WEASELS, CANNIBALS & KILLER BUMPKINS GOING CHEAP!

AN INTERVIEW WITH LOW-BUDGET GORE MASTER NATHAN SCHIFF.

VERMILION VISCERA!

THE MAN

I bet 80% of you out there in reader-land have owned a scratchy, black and white copy of one of this guys films? You know if you have, for titles like "WEASELS RIP MY FLESH", "LONG ISLAND CANNIBAL MASSACRE" and "THEY DON'T CUT THE GRASS ANYMORE" don't leave your memory very quickly, and that's saying nothing for the films themselves!

The man in question is a Mr Nathan Schiff. You might well have read about him in "DEEP RED #5"? But since then the man himself has been busy finishing an epic called "VERMILION EYES", which has yet to greet the unsuspecting public.

I was very lucky to get a postal interview with Nathan and what follows is a blow-for-blow account of that very same questions and answers by mail interview.

Q: WHEN AND WHY DID YOU DECIDE TO GET INTO FILM-MAKING?

A: I was eleven years old. As a child movies were really mind candy for me. They were something that stimulated certain aspects of the developing brain of youth. I immersed myself in all of it, nothing could escape being recorded, analysed and absorbed within the shell of my knowledge thirsty mind. And indeed when I discovered that I was capable of projecting my own images via a home movie camera... that is how it began. It would be several more years before I learned one must also have a distributor.

Q: THERE SEEMS TO BE A LOT OF H.G. LEWIS IN YOUR FILMS, WAS HE A MAJOR INFLUENCE? WHO ELSE WAS?

A: No suffice to say that I had never seen a Lewis picture until after "THEY DON'T CUT THE GRASS ANYMORE". I had just finished shooting and was in post production when a friend showed me this video of all the gore footage from "The Gore Gore Girls", horrible washed out scratchy footage. I liked the music and that Lewis had the nerve to use a march by Johann Strauss for mutilation scenes. Then I saw "Bloodfeast" and, I don't know why, I put in a newspaper cutting headline that reads "Legs Cut Off", but her whole body was destroyed! In that regard you could say I was influenced. I suppose the genre as a whole was an influence.

Q: WHAT ORDER WERE YOUR FILMS MADE?

A: "WEASELS RIP MY FLESH", "LONG ISLAND CANNIBAL MASSACRE" and "THEY DON'T CUT THE GRASS ANYMORE".

Q: YOUR FILMS ARE OBVIOUSLY MADE ON A VERY LOW BUDGET, DO YOU FINANCE THEM YOURSELF?

A: Yes, although I have been told a shrewder investment would have been the purchase of a candy bar.

Q: YOU USE A LOT OF MUSIC FROM OTHER PEOPLE'S FILMS IN YOURS, DO YOU EVER GET ANT FEED-BACK FROM ANYONE WHO'S MUSIC YOU'VE USED?

A: Never. Who cares! My films are so insignificantly cheap who would have the energy to bother? Besides, they should be flattered that I found their soundtracks adequate enough to employ in my productions.

Q: IT SAID IN "DEEP RED" THAT YOU DO ALL THE F.X. YOURSELF, DID YOU HAVE ANY TRAINING IN THAT OR ANYTHING ELSE?

A: Everything I have ever done has been self-taught. No film school. No special make-up training. Unfortunately, I hate doing special F.X.. I'm not an F.X. person. I really wish I didn't have to bother with any of it, it's simply a matter of necessity. You must keep in mind that had I received any training I'd probably be an accountant now!

Q: A LOT OF THE ACTORS IN YOUR FILMS LOOK VERY SIMILAR, I WONDER WHY THAT IS?

A: If two is a lot (seemed like more...Ed) then so be it. I have only used the same two people, John Smihula and Fred Borges in "Weasels..." & "...Massacre". Smihula was also in "...Grass" and is the main character in "Vermilion Eyes". I can't say enough about John Smihula. He is the heart of the films. He does everything, literally. If the heart stops pumping - well you get the idea. A resilient, charming lad.

Q: WHERE DO YOU GET YOUR ACTORS AND ACTRESSES FROM?

A: Most are friends and/or acquaintances. I have never used a, so-called, professional actor. I suppose I didn't have to tell you that! A lot of those who appear in the films had never seen one prior to actually

LONG ISLAND MAGGOT MASSACRE!

AND AGAIN!

THE EYES HAVE IT!

starring in one. Another reason I rarely use the same person twice!

Q: WHAT KIND OF FEED-BACK HAVE YOU HAD FROM HORROR FANS AROUND THE WORLD, TO YOUR MOVIES?

A: I'm surprised to find that people from all over the world appear to like the pictures very much. Since I sincerely believe that no-body who has made any film anywhere that has received any kind of press are cheaper than mine. Now I don't use the term "cheap" to show how much production value I can get from each dollar, that's not the issue at all. One must understand how difficult it is to create a product that will be considered acceptable to the viewer. If one can get through that picture and he or she says, "Gee, that wasn't bad" - well then you're pretty damn lucky. I have no crew, no sophisticated equipment - it's amazing they exist at all! Even by Super-8 standards.

Q: HOW ARE YOUR MOVIES SOLD, DO YOU HAVE A DISTRIBUTOR?

A: I sell them myself through mail-order, although I haven't in quite some time. I spoke with a distributor and they prepared a package for the films. They wanted to retitle "LONG ISLAND CANNIBAL MASSACRE" as "CANNIBAL HOOKERS Part 2"! "But there are no hookers in the film!" They said "don't worry - we'll find a connection". This is the mentality of some of the people who deal with this stuff.

Q: SO TELL ME ABOUT "VERMILION EYES", HOW DID IT COME ABOUT?

A: I felt there was a dead end to the kind of films I was making. You must keep in mind that when I made those films the market had not yet been flooded with endless bloodbaths that were made basically to show-off bloody special effects. When I made those films I thought I was doing something different - of course as it turned out they were beginning to look like simply, more of the same. A psycho with a chainsaw, a psycho with a lawnmower, tweezers, hair-pins etc.. I felt I was losing sight of reason in favour of result and so I decided to make "VERMILION EYES".

Q: WHAT IS THE STORY OF "VERMILION EYES"?

A: It's about a man obsessed with death and sex, women and death. He has become disillusioned with life and seeks an answer. He fantasises about death, dreams about death. He wears a decontamination suit and films highway fatalities and other tragedies that involve death. At one point makes love with death. Not a putrid rotting half-decomposed corpse, which I personally don't find disturbing, just foolish. To make love to a fresh intact body in a severe state of rigormortis is much more distressing. Well this man's journey becomes darker and darker until.....Ahh, but enough. I don't want to ruin it.

Q: DO YOU A DEAL SORTED OUT FOR IT YET?

A: No deal. I don't believe I'm ready to sell it. I don't know when?

Q: WHAT WAS THE BUDGET? AND HOW LONG IS WHAT YOU DESCRIBED AS "A RATHER LONG FEATURE"?

A: Really cheap. But more expensive than the others. It's the most polished film I've done. Forgive me if I'm being evasive, it's a matter of ethics. Let's just say I could trade you the budget for a really good stereo system! The film runs 2hrs 25minutes. It was longer, but when I begin to alienate myself - a line must be drawn!

Q: WHAT PLANS HAVE YOU GOT FOR THE FUTURE? WOULD YOU LIKE TO BE SET LOOSE WITH A MAJOR BUDGET? WHAT KIND OF FILM WOULD YOU MAKE?

A: Many ideas. Many. Naturally I would embrace a major budget. I would use the same ideas only the more money the more one can expand on the idea.

Q: WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THE CURRENT CROP OF HORROR RELEASES AND THE STATE OF HORROR IN THE NINETIES?

A: At the risk of having your staff and your entire readership become very angry. I must confess that I think very little of all of it. You see I found these type of pictures to be more endearing when they were new to the market. The 60's and early 70's. When they were real exploitation - when you knew the film makers were in it soley for the money - cos they turned out the best stuff. H.G. Lewis, Andy Milligan, Michael Findlay, Roger Corman, William Girdler etc... These were the pure exploitation films. You cannot bring back that time and climate. It's a point in history, today's stuff is really rotten because it's all self-conscious, self-indulgent and every-body is copy-catting everybody and trying to make films and live up to films that are terrible to begin with. And the advent of video where everybody can make a movie - and you can watch any movie over and over and study every frame. The whole mystique is gone.

Q: HAVE YOU A CURRENT FAVOURITE DIRECTOR/FILM MAKER?

A: I'm my own favourite director, but only for films that will never get made because they could never live up to how I perceive them in my mind. So I am my favourite director of unmade and never to be made films.
Of made films "Akira Kurosawa" is my favourite.

And that's the way it looked in print. Read on for reviews of all three of Nathan's films to date and keep watching this space for a "VERMILION EYES" EXCLUSIVE!

THANKS NATHAN

HIS FILMS

WEASELS RIP MY FLESH

Directed by: NATHAN SCHIFF.
Starring: FRED DABBY, JOHN SMIHULA, FRED BORGES, JODY KADISH, STEVEN KRIETE.

The first of the Schiff trio so far released + it's an impressive debut. The thing with this kind of low budget, trashy, sleaze you've got to

THEY DON'T CUT THEIR HAIR ANYMORE.

put all preconceptions you've got about Hollywood horror films way back in your mind and just sit there, have a laugh, and enjoy the cheap and tinny, but unbelievably exciting roller-coaster ride.

The ride starts in '50s-sci-fi-land with a toilet-roll space rocket crashing to earth in a pond, its carrying several pods of slimy stuff that are thrown from the rocket and found by a couple of kids. One of the kids is bitten by a weasel as they are standing by the pond and so as revenge they pour the contents of a pod into the weasel's hole. Needless to say this stuff makes the weasel grow to an immense size and an appetite for human flesh grows with it.

It's very easy to spot Nathan's love for old films just by watching the start of this, it's '50s B-movie through and through.

Anyway the mega-weasel gets its first taste of human-burgers with the kids but soon goes further a field in search of food, unfortunately whilst crossing a road near the pond it's hit by a car and has an arm ripped off - turns out that each part of the weasel can survive on its own and soon the arm has grown teeth and everyone it bites turns rabid.

Enter the cops but not for long, as soon as they arrive at the pond to investigate the murders they're abducted by a nut who is keeping a mutant weasel in his underground hide away and wants to use their blood to purify the weasel's rabid plasma.

It's great to play spot the soundtrack on Nathan's films; "Dawn of the Dead" I noticed here, amongst others. Apart from that though his films are totally unique.

This isn't the goriest of his films by far but still has its moments such as arms being ripped and sawed off, a chest being ripped apart with a knife and various dismembered corpses lying around. The giant weasel is great and it finally meets its end at the hands of a wonderful ½ weasel, ½ cop creature. The acting is surprisingly good and the directing very competent. On the whole a cheezy classic.

THE FILM: ***
THE GORE: ***

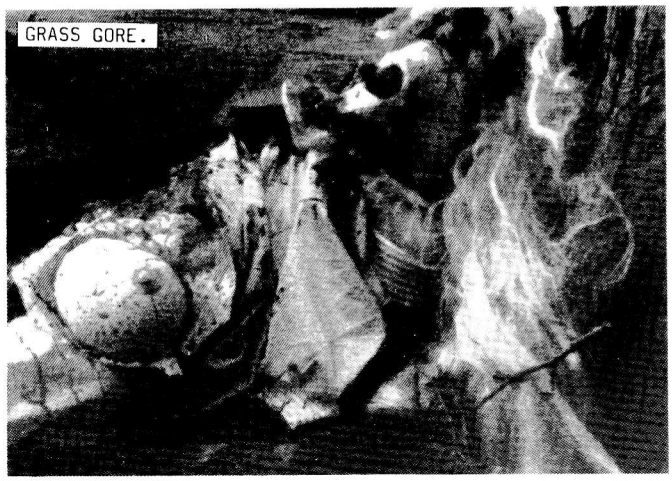
LONG ISLAND CANNIBAL MASSACRE

Directed by: NATHAN SCHIFF.
Starring: JOHN SMIHULA, FRED BORGES, MICHAEL SIEGAL, JUDI GOUREVICH, PAUL SMIHULA, NANCY CANBERG.

Now this is the stuff Schiff is infamous for, even before the credits a girl is grabbed in the woods and tied up, then the nut who abducted her runs over face with a lawn-mower and pulls all the bits out of the mower bag, and that's before the credits!

Then the credits, accompanied by music from "Forbidden Planet" if I'm not very much mistaken? And the story continues:

A girl's head is found on a private beach and the scummy beach owner has to bribe the guy who found it to keep



quiet. This makes the beach owner late for a meeting with the guys who killed the girl found on the beach, the guys who are supplying body bits to feed the beach owner's father.

Turns out the guy who took the bribe on the beach is a cop and he's on the case in a big way. Meanwhile there's more killings and more O.T.T. gore, including a bunch of intestines made out of sausage casings ripped out of a guy, a girl has her throat slit and so the list goes on.

Nathan may well hate doing the F.X. on his films but he has a certain flair for making something out of nothing, the same could be said for every aspect of his films.

Anyway the cop has quit the force to chase the killers on his own (?), but first he goes on holiday, while he's away though the cannibals do play, and more blood is spilled, trouble is the cannibal's son is getting fed up with feeding his father, but it's not that easy to stop, his father won't let him, now the cop's back and here's his chance to stop - for good!

Everyone in this film is after gore, even the cop does some mutilation of his own when he catches up with the gang members... ahh but! No I'm not telling you, there's a real surprise ending!

This is a really good solid film,

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low budget doesn't mean low imagination, so I don't know why I'm so surprised? Why doesn't somebody give this guy a couple of million $'s? He could do wonders! Shit I'm starting to sound obsessed with money and budgets, I'm not really honest! Hey there's that "Dawn..." music again! This guy only steals from the best films! I love it!

THE FILM: ***½
THE GORE: ***½

THEY DON'T CUT THE GRASS ANYMORE

Directed by: NATHAN SCHIFF.
Starring: JOHN SMIHULA, ADAM BERKE, MARY SPADARO, LEANA MANGIARANO, MATT ZAGON, LISA STANISLAW..

It seems the newer the film the gorier it is, he must've really got the taste, God knows what "VERMILION EYES" is going to be like if that's the case?
Nathan always likes to start the film before the credits and "I.D.C.T.G.A." is no exception. It starts with a mutilated doll and a voice over that talks about fate, society and the world going mad. This is followed by a radio news broadcast that tells of all the disasters in the area and the traffic report, but the real groceries follow this lot - a couple are brutally murdered in a park and mutilated beyond recognition.
Turns out the killers are a pair of country bumpkins working in the city and walking around dressed like circus freaks, funny how nobody even bats an eyelid at their appearance, I guess that it's a symptom of the big city mentality?
Anyway the freak brothers find themselves another couple and really go to town - the guy gets a hot metal spike shoved up his arse and then shot and the woman... well gets gutted and basically ripped to shreds so you can't even recognise it's a bunch of pigs intestines covered in rubber skin... sorry a human being! This is followed by the newspaper headline mentioned in the interview - "LEGS CUT OFF!" and an introduction to the police, who are on the case, bad accents and all.
The gore is amazing! Though not amazingly done it's so O.T.T. you don't even notice, for example a young girl is grabbed on her lawn by the duo and has a fire-work put in her mouth and exploded, then she's shot in the crutch with a rifle and her private parts eaten by an Alsatian. For some reason the acting is much worse than the other two films? Maybe it's intentional? You'd expect it to get better, not worse, wouldn't you?
There's not much of a story to "THEY DON'T CUT THE GRASS ANYMORE" it seems more like an experiment in gore? If you didn't know better you'd swear that Schiff had seen "THE GORE GORE GIRLS" before making this, but there ya go! Not the best of the three, I preferred "LONG ISLAND CANNIBAL MASSACRE"! But they're all great fun and pure entertainment!

LONG ISLAND CHAINSAW MASSACRE.

THE FILM: **
THE GORE: *****

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